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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 002207

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GH](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT RAWLINGS RAISES ELECTION CONCERNS
WITH POLCHIEF

Classified By: DCM Jerry Lanier for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) On November 6, PolChief met with former President (and senior National Democratic Party activist) J.J. Rawlings, at Rawlings' request, in his home. He was joined by his wife and two senior NDC party officials. Rawlings decried what he saw as an unlevel playing field in this election, claiming the Electoral Commission is biased and the voting register is seriously flawed. If the election is rigged, the military could become frustrated and try to stage a coup, he opined. He thought the USG was too pro-NPP. Rawlings hoped foreign missions would push for a recheck of the register and would post observers in the EC on election day. PolChief stressed our interest in free, fair, peaceful, democratic elections, noting that we had met recently with the NDC and all parties, and stated that we would be cautious and even-handed in our approach to the election. End summary.

NO LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

2. (C) Rawlings and his associates expressed serious concerns that there was not a fair playing field in the run-up to the December 7 presidential and parliamentary elections. Some reportedly nonpartisan NGOs involved in election monitoring are biased toward the NPP, they alleged, specifically naming Pronet and the Center for Democratic Development (CDD). The NPP is using large sums of money to buy votes, deliberately distorting NDC rallies on television to make them look smaller than they are, using public buses for party propaganda, and other alleged abuses of incumbency.

THE ELECTION REGISTER FLAWED

3. (C) Rawlings highlighted problems with the voter register. The EC was biased toward and controlled by the NPP, he alleged, contending that it was tampering with the register. Specifically, he alleged that the EC had changed the names of some elderly voters to known NPP supporters, and left gaps in the serial numbers of the register to facilitate fake voting on polling day. Some photos on the register were fading because they were poor quality. Rawlings and his colleagues were appalled with the EC's admission that 55 percent of registered voters did not appear to check the register during the October 12-17 exhibition. (Note: This does not appear to be unusually high since the purpose of checking the register was merely to confirm information on those who were already legally registered). They blamed the EC for mismanaging the process, requiring voters to make separate trips to register, take photos, and check the registration list, and allowing too little time to finalize the register. They suspect the NPP will try stuffing ballots either on election day or during vote counting.

OTHER ATTACKS ON THE NPP

4. (C) Rawlings and his colleagues scoffed at the NPP's purported accomplishments. The NPP's "So Far, So Good" list of achievements was "70 percent lies" or achievements initiated by the former PNDC (Rawlings) government. The government of President Kufuor had violated human rights in its involvement with the murder of the Ya Na in Dagomba (Northern Region) in 2002, was damaging the country's economy, and was very corrupt, according to Rawlings. The NPP had "replaced respect with fear of authority", and unduly favoring Akans in the government and army (Kufuor is an Ashanti, the dominant Akan tribe). Worst of all, Rawlings said, were the NPP's "party police" who "want to create havoc."

HINTS OF A MILITARY COUP

5. (C) Rawlings was confident the NDC would win the upcoming

election despite these problems. However, he devoted significant time to justifying his own military coups of the past and suggested that if this election is seen as rigged, some in the military could possibly try to stage a coup, "and no one could hold them back". If world opinion had not shifted strongly against military intervention, Kufuor would have already been overthrown in a coup, he said.

USG ACTIONS

16. (C) Rawlings and his colleagues contended that the USG had favored the NPP in 2000 because, he said, the U.S. believed a change of party was important to validate Ghana's democracy. In 2000, Western donors were too quick to declare the election free and fair, Rawlings asserted, stating "don't be intoxicated with the NPP because they are the government in power." His wife began the discussion by urging that PolChief be "open-minded about the NDC, unlike some of your colleagues."

17. (C) PolChief emphasized that the USG's interest is that the upcoming election be a free, fair, and peaceful democratic representation of the will of the Ghanaian people, no matter who wins. He noted that we had met with the NDC presidential candidate John Atta Mills and some of his senior colleagues, as well as senior party leaders from the NPP and other parties, the EC, and civil society. We had also traveled widely during the pre-election period and were tracking election events closely. PolChief noted that we take the NDC's concerns seriously and did raise some of these issues about the voting register with the EC. He noted that the Embassy was contributing over \$1 million to the EC and election-related work, and that we would contribute substantially to the pool of foreign Mission observers deployed in this election. We would proceed in a cautious, even-handed manner. PolChief highlighted the role party polling agents needed to play to ensure the election was fair.

18. (C) PolChief asked what at this point could be done to increase the NDC's confidence in the voter register. "It's not too late to do something", Rawlings said, noting his hope that the register would be shared with all the parties soon (the parties had the list to review two months before the 2000 election). He hoped foreign observers would not just deploy in the field but would be present in the EC office on election day. "Our polling agents will be vigilant and know what to do", he said.

COMMENT

19. (C) There is an element of drama and paranoia in Rawlings' world view: the USG is against the NDC, the NPP is bent on rigging the election, the EC is biased, the military is disgruntled. While generally welcoming, he was often distracted, fussing with picture frames, pills, the stereo, his cell phone. Several times he cut off PolChief's efforts to respond to his points. His claims about EC register manipulation was unsubstantiated and fears of NPP manipulation probably overstated. His talk of military coups seemed loose and theoretical, but pointed ("I want you to be clear about what I'm saying", he asserted).

110. (C) Nonetheless, his deep distrust of the NPP and of preparations for this election are disturbing. We heard similar views from NDC party leaders and activists in Kumasi (Ashanti region) over the past few days. NDC workers claim the NPP is tearing down their posters, intimidating their candidates, and spreading large amounts of cash to buy votes. Some of these claims appear credible, in that it is clear that each major party is removing the posters of the other, and one presumes that vote-buying is a feature of practically all elections in countries such as Ghana. Rawlings' frustration with the EC and the voting register, shared to some measure by many in civil society, casts some doubt on whether the NDC would readily accept an electoral defeat (although Atta Mills, who does not necessarily get his marching orders from Rawlings, has told us he would accept the results). Rawlings' thoughts about military coup possibilities bear watching, especially in light of the NDC's fears of a flawed election and eagerness to get back in power (and Ghana's history of coups), as well as the arrest of seven people over the weekend for alleged coup plotting (reftel XXX).

11. (SBU) The USG -- through USAID and PAS support for the election process, our observer teams, our meetings with all the parties and ongoing dialogue with the Electoral Commission, and our cautious approach to public statements about the election -- has been playing an important role in strengthening confidence in and acceptability of the election results. The Rawlings meeting underscores the need to continue with these efforts. End Comment.

YATES